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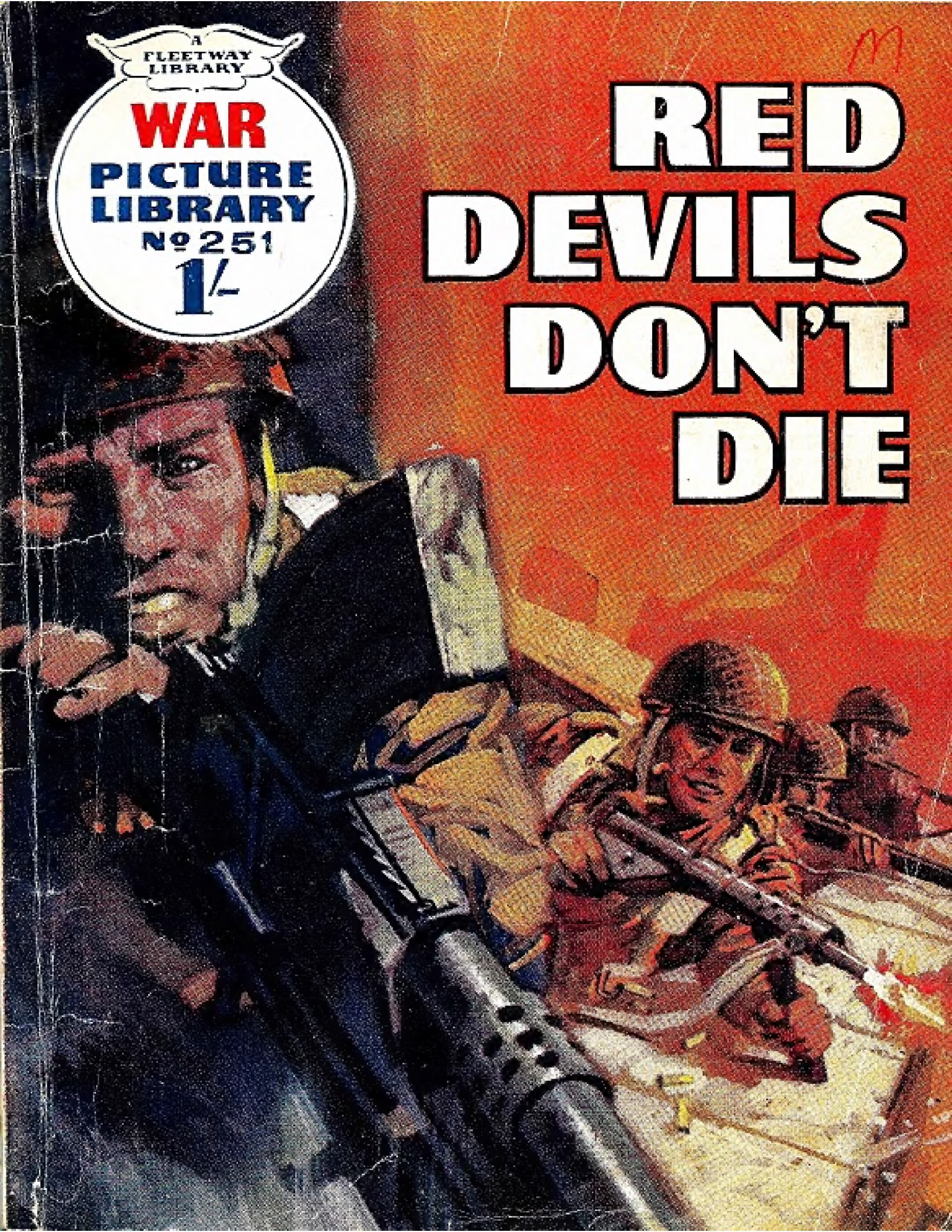
RED DEVILS DON'T DIE



ALSO ON SALE NOW
WAR PICTURE LIBRARY

No. 248—TARGET AFLAME

A non-combatant, thrown by chance into battle—should have been a dead duck. But this "duck" was as dangerous as an eagle.

No. 249—THE PHANTOM SERGEANT

He stepped from the dark jungle—a gaunt shadow of a man. Where had he come from? Where was he leading them?

No. 250—SHADOW OF THE EAGLE

They were brothers separated by the maelstrom of war—destined to meet again in bitter desert conflict.

EXTRA...! EXTRA...! EXTRA...!

TOPS in holiday reading...

all action picture-stories in EACH issue!

ON SALE NOW

RED DEVILS DON'T DIE

WITH THE GOTHIC LINE BROKEN, THE EIGHTH ARMY LAUNCHED ITS FINAL OFFENSIVE TOWARDS BOLOGNA IN NORTHERN ITALY. BEHIND IT LAY THE DESOLATE MILESTONES OF VICTORY. AHEAD, AN ENEMY FIGHTING WITH A SUICIDAL FEROCITY THAT INCREASED WITH EVERY BITTERLY CONTESTED YARD.

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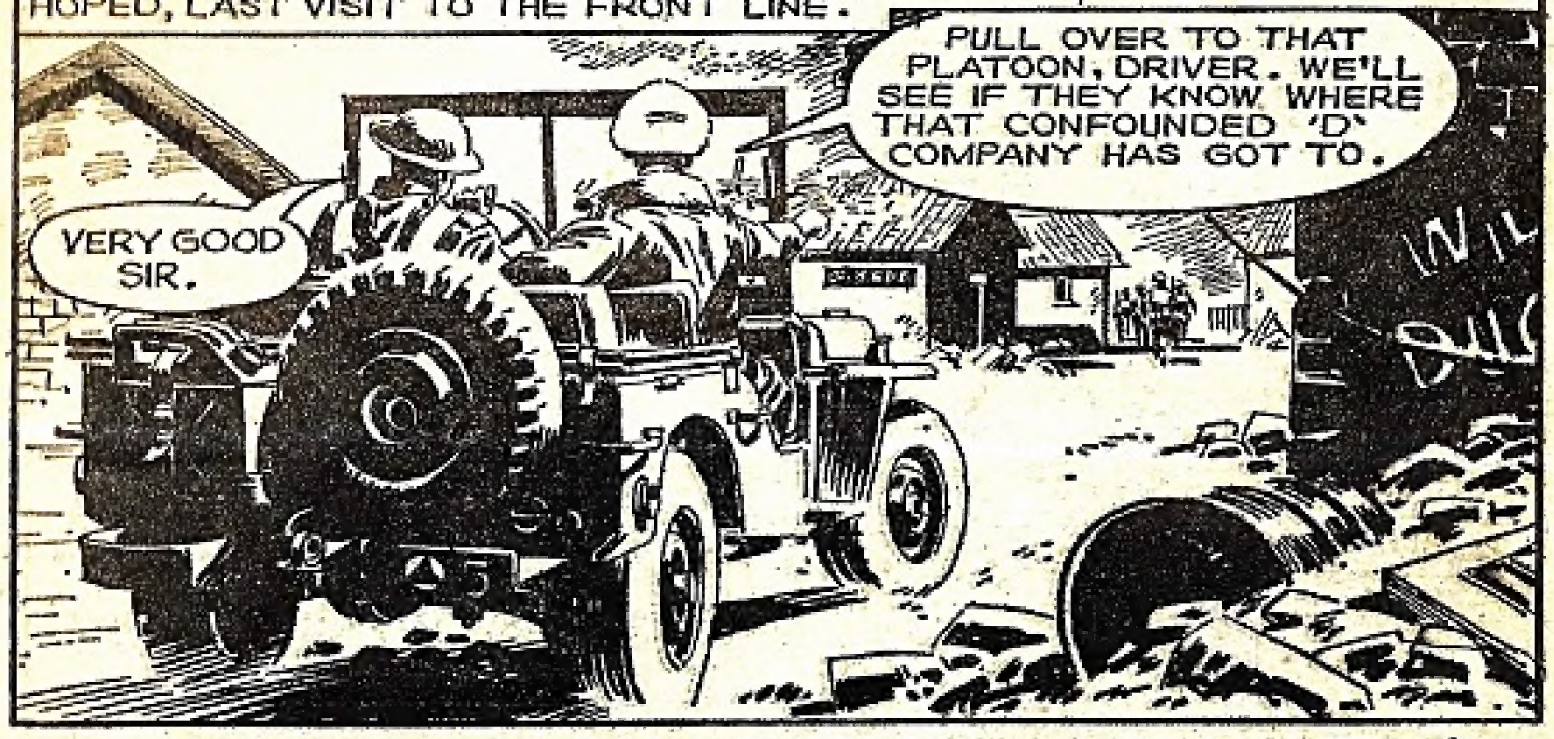
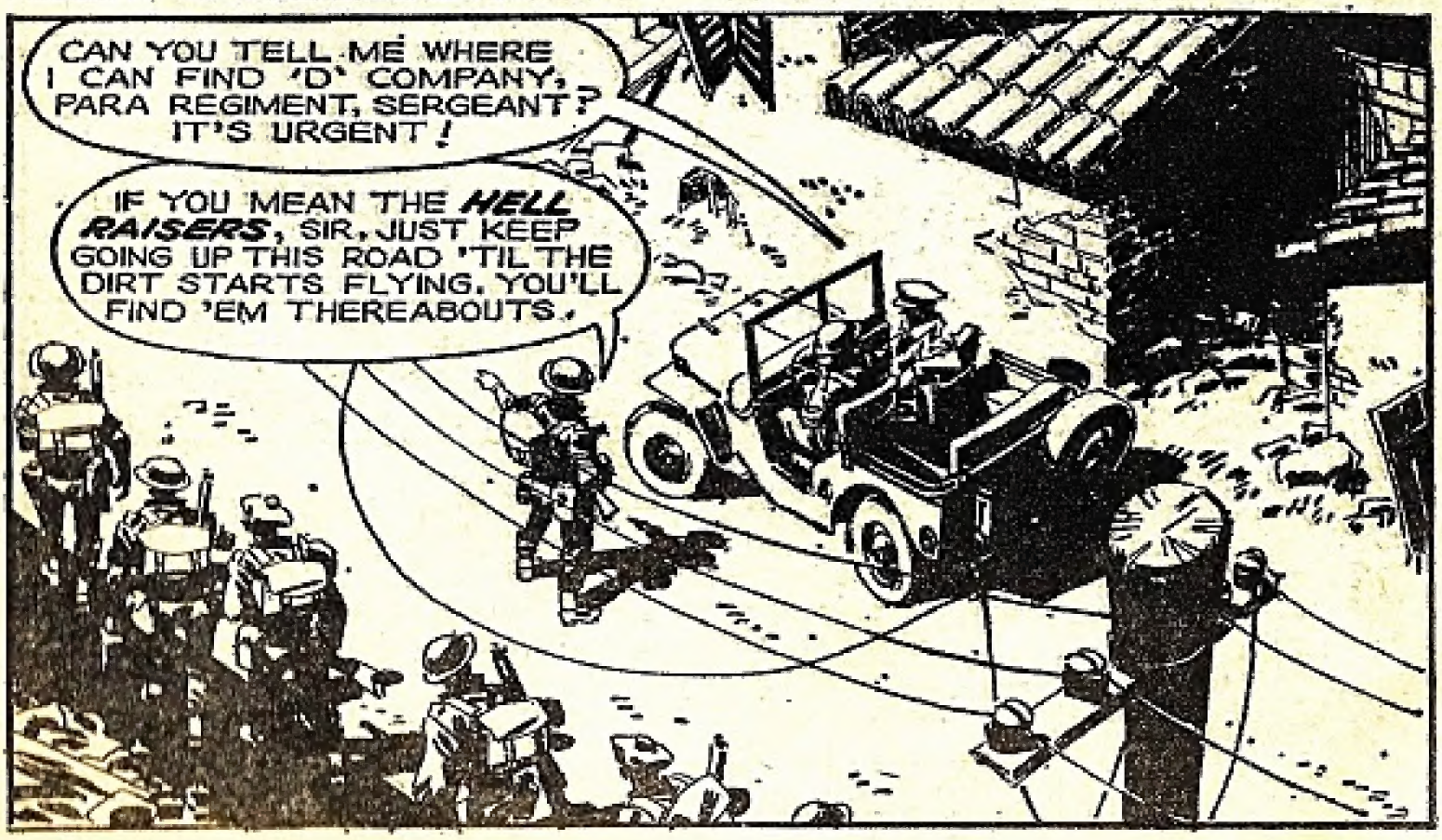
Chapter 1. The Hell Raisers

UNTIL HIS RECENT TRANSFER AS LIAISON OFFICER TO THE BRIGADE, LIEUTENANT HUGH PONSENBY HAD ENDURED THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN IN THE COMPARATIVE COMFORT OF G.H.Q. NAPLES. THIS WAS HIS FIRST AND, HE HOPED, LAST VISIT TO THE FRONT LINE.





CAUTIOUSLY, THEY DROVE ON FOR ANOTHER MILE UNTIL A SUDDEN CRISP CHALLENGE RANG OUT...
HALT — OR I FIRE!
YOU, THERE! I'M LOOKING FOR DON COMPANY.
BEST DO AS THEY SAY, SIR. THIS OUTFIT USUALLY SHOOTS FIRST THEN ASKS AFTERWARDS.
THE PARATROOPS SAUNTERED CASUALLY UP TO THE JEEP.
YOU'VE FOUND US, PAL!
DON'T YOU KNOW HOW TO ADDRESS AN OFFICER? TAKE ME TO CAPTAIN HOWARD.
LUCKY WE STOPPED YOU. JERRY'S GOT THE DROP ON THE ROAD JUST AHEAD. THEY'D HAVE KNOCKED THOSE SHINY PIPS CLEAN OFF YOUR SHOULDERS.
CHOPPER, BARNEY, BELT UP! YOUR IDENTIFICATION PAPERS, SIR...
THERE WAS A COLD GLEAM IN THE CORPORAL'S EYE, AND HE QUIETLY PRODUCED HIS IDENTITY CARD.
WE'RE A BIT CAGEY ABOUT STRANGERS UP HERE, SIR.
LET'S BE MOVING, DUKE. I CAN SMELL KRAUTS ROUND HERE SOME PLACE!

THE HARD PACE SET BY CORPORAL DUKE BROUGHT SWEAT POURING DOWN THE LIEUTENANT'S FACE.
HOW--HOW MUCH FARTHER, CORPORAL?
WE'VE GOT A CUSHY LITTLE BILLET IN SOME CAVES JUST OVER THE NEXT RIDGE.
IF THE MEN OF "D" COMPANY HAD EVER HEARD OF KING'S REGULATIONS THEY HAD LONG SINCE FORGOTTEN THEM.
HEY, MUNGO! YOU'VE GOT A VISITOR!
GREAT SCOTT! THEY LOOK MORE LIKE A BAND OF GUERILLAS!
OI, ERB! TAKE A SHUFTI AT WHAT THE DUKE'S BROUGHT IN!
LUMME! A REAL SOLDIER. DON'T 'E LOOK LOVELY!

THE SIGHT OF THE SHOCKED FACE OF THE YOUNG OFFICER BROUGHT A WRY SMILE TO THE HARSH LINES OF CAPTAIN MUNGO HOWARD'S FACE.
47-P
DON'T MIND MY LADS, LIEUTENANT. I'M AFRAID THEIR MANNERS HAVE SLIPPED A BIT THESE LAST FEW MONTHS.
CAPTAIN HOWARD, AN URGENT ORDER FROM BRIGADE, SIR!

SO THE BRIGADIER WANTS US TO TAKE A CRACK AT RASSINO! TELL HIM WE WANT THAT EYTIE TOWN POUNDED INTO DUST FIRST, THEN MAYBE WE'LL GO IN.
BUT WHY, SIR? INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THERE IS ONLY A SMALL GERMAN GARRISON.

I DON'T GIVE A TINKER'S CUSS WHAT INTELLIGENCE SAYS! THE JERRIES ARE IN RASSINO.. YOU JUST SCRAM BACK TO H.Q. AND TELL 'EM... NO AIR STRIKE--NO ATTACK!

AN HOUR LATER, LIEUTENANT PONSENBY, STILL FLUSHED WITH INDIGNATION, REPORTED TO THE BRIGADIER.
I FEEL IT MY DUTY TO REPORT THAT I BELIEVE CAPTAIN HOWARD SHOULD BE RELIEVED OF HIS COMMAND. HIS WHOLE COMPANY IS NOTHING BUT A--A RABBLE, SIR!
I'M INCLINED TO AGREE WITH YOU, LIEUTENANT. BUT IT SO HAPPENS THAT RABBLE HAS GIVEN THE GERMANS MORE PUNISHMENT THAN THE REST OF THE DIVISION PUT TOGETHER. WHAT ELSE DID MUNGO SAY?
HE SAID--HE SAID, NO AIR STRIKE, NO ATTACK, SIR.
BETTER LAY ON WITH THE R.A.F. FOR A STRIKE AT 0-FOUR-HUNDRED HOURS TOMORROW, JOHN.
OKAY, SIR. NEVER KNOWN MUNGO CALL FOR SUPPORT WITHOUT GOOD REASON.

STAGGERED BY THE CALM REACTIONS OF HIS SENIORS, THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT SALUTED AND WAS ABOUT TO MARCH OUT WHEN THE BRIGADIER CALLED AFTER HIM. THERE WAS A MALICIOUS GLEAM OF HUMOUR IN HIS EYE.

I THINK IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA IF YOU WENT IN WITH 'D' COMPANY ON THIS ATTACK, PONSENBY. MAYBE YOU'LL FIND OUT WHY THEY'RE CALLED HOWARD'S HELL RAISERS...

AT EXACTLY 04·00 HOURS THE FOLLOWING MORNING, LANCASTER BOMBERS UNLEASHED A SATURATING DELUGE OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE ON TO RASSINO.

SCHNELL, SCHNELL!

THE BOMBERS WHEELED SOUTH AND IN THE FIRST FLUSH OF DAWN, ROCKET-FIRING TYPHOONS SCREAMED IN TO PULVERISE THE SMOULDERING RUINS.

THE R.A.F. BOYS HAVE DONE US PROUD, SERGEANT. PREPARE TO ADVANCE!

SURELY NOTHING COULD HAVE SURVIVED THAT?

THEY'LL BE THERE, SIR, BUT IT'LL HAVE TAKEN THE STING OUT OF THEIR TAILS.

COOLLY, REMORSELESSLY, THE WHOLE COMPANY MOVED FORWARD ACROSS THE START LINE.

YOU ALL KNOW THE DRILL. IF WE HIT ANY POCKETS OF RESISTANCE, GO TO GROUND AND WE'LL FLUSH 'EM OUT WITH MORTARS.

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE TOWN, THEY PASSED GRIM JUSTIFICATION OF THE CAPTAIN'S PRUDENCE.

SO MUCH FOR YOUR INTELLIGENCE REPORTS, PONSENBY! THIS TOWN WAS A GERMAN HEDGEHOG.

I--I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN.

THEN THE STILL AIR WAS SHATTERED BY THE RATTLE OF SMALL ARMS FIRE.

AS ANGRY BULLETS WHINED THROUGH THE AIR, THE PARATROOPS MELTED INTO THE RUBBLE.
BETCHA HALF MY 'K' RATIONS YOU CAN'T LOB ONE THROUGH THE TOP WINDOW FIRST GO OFF, CHOPPER.
SOMEONE'S ASKING FOR TROUBLE!
YOU'RE ON, MATE!

BARNEY SMITH LOST HIS BET. THE GUN CEASED ABRUPTLY AND, A MINUTE LATER, A WHITE CLOTH FLUTTERED FROM A WINDOW.

FOR A MOMENT, CHOPPER RUDGE GLANCED AT THE SERGEANT, AN UNSPOKEN QUESTION IN HIS EYES.
WHAT'S UP, RUDGE? YOU GOING SOFT? THOSE ARE S.S. TROOPS! THREE H.E. BOMBS, FIRE!

LIEUTENANT PONSENBY WATCHED IN HORROR AS THE HOUSE WAS GUTTED WITH HIGH EXPLOSIVE.
THOSE GERMANS WANTED TO SURRENDER. THAT WAS MURDER, CAPTAIN!
JUST BEFORE YOU PASS JUDGMENT, I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING. FOLLOW ME..

THE CAPTAIN LED THE WAY DOWN A NARROW ALLEY TO A SMALL COURTYARD..
YES, CIVILIANS, LIEUTENANT. MY PATROLS FOUND THEM. NOT PRETTY, IS IT? THIS TOWN WAS HELD BY AN S.S. UNIT. WE DIDN'T CHOOSE TO START THIS SCRAP, BUT WE AIM TO FINISH IT

THEY PUSHED ON INTO THE TOWN WHERE OTHER PARATROOPERS WERE FIGHTING WITH RUTHLESS SKILL AND EFFICIENCY.
WE DON'T FIGHT BY QUEENSBERRY RULES, LIEUTENANT, BUT WE'VE BEEN UP THE SHARP END A LONG WHILE. WE DON'T AIM TO COLLECT MEDALS, JUST STAY ALIVE AND FINISH THIS FILTHY WAR.

THE MILLS BOMB FLUSHED THE GERMAN STORM TROOPS FROM THE HOUSE AND CORPORAL DUKE'S STEN GUN COMPLETED THEIR ROUT.

SPASMODIC FIRING DIED AWAY TO THE NORTH OF THE TOWN.
DUKE'S GETTING CARELESS. IT TOOK HIM NEARLY HALF A MAG TO FINISH THIS LOT OFF.
NO WONDER YOU'RE CALLED THE HELL ~~
JUST AT THAT MOMENT, THE SHUTTERED WINDOWS OF A HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET BURST VIOLENTLY OPEN.

HEY, MUNGO! LOOK WHAT I FOUND HALF-WAY UP THE CHIMNEY!
HAVEN'T YOU GOT ANY RESPECT FOR AN OFFICER, CHOPPER? PUT HIM DOWN!

PRIVATE RUDGE PROMPTLY RELEASED HIS HOLD ON THE NAZI OFFICER AND WHIPPED UP A SMART SALUTE.
SORRY, SIR!

THE ATTACK WAS OVER AND LIEUTENANT HUGH PONSENBY WAS ONLY TOO PLEASED TO QUIT THE COMPANY OF THOSE HARD-FACED MEN WHO WORE THE RED BERET.

THE JERRIES ARE HEADING NORTH, SIR.

TELL THE BRIGADIER WE'LL BE PUSHING ON. YOU CAN TAKE THE JERRY BACK AS A SOUVENIR.

YES-YES, SIR. I'LL TELL HIM.

THE LIEUTENANT'S JEEP DISAPPEARED IN A CLOUD OF DUST. HE DID NOT LOOK BACK.

PERHAPS IF HE HAD, HE WOULD HAVE SEEN THE BITTERNESS THAT MONTHS OF FIGHTING HAD BRANDED ON CAPTAIN MUNGO HOWARD'S FACE.

SCUTTLE OFF BACK TO YOUR COCKTAIL PARTIES IN NAPLES, SOLDIER BOY, AND TELL 'EM IT WAS. HELL UP THE SHARP END! YOU DON'T LIKE THE WAY WE FIGHT AND I GUESS WE DON'T THINK MUCH OF IT OURSELVES — BUT SOMEONE'S GOT TO DO THE DIRTY WORK!

ALREADY THE LOCAL INHABITANTS WERE RETURNING FROM THE HILLS TO SCRATCH AMONG THE RUINS FOR SALVAGE.
NO CASUALTIES, SIR. PRETTY GOOD MORNING'S WORK!
I SUPPOSE SO, SERGEANT, BUT I DOUBT IF THESE POOR DEVILS WOULD AGREE WITH US. WE'LL MOVE ON AT 09·00!
THESE WERE THE MOMENTS THE CAPTAIN HATED. THE OBJECTIVE TAKEN WITHOUT CASUALTIES. BUT A TOWN WAS DESTROYED, AND THE INNOCENT HAD SUFFERED.

AT THE SIGHT OF THE RATION TRUCK, A SWARM OF EMACIATED ITALIAN CHILDREN APPEARED FROM NOWHERE. IT WAS HARD TO RECOGNISE THE GOOD-NATURED MEN WHO WILLINGLY SHARED OUT THEIR MEAL AS THE COLD-BLOODED KILLERS WHO HAD STALKED THE STREETS LESS THAN AN HOUR PREVIOUSLY.
WHY'S THAT POOR LITTLE PERISHER SITTING OVER THERE?
SORT YOURSELVES OUT, KIDS. COME ON, ONE AT A TIME!
WOULDN'T KNOW, MATE, BUT HE AIN'T LAUGHING HIS-HEAD OFF!

Chapter 2. The New Recruit

SOMEWHERE UNDER HIS RUGGED EXTERIOR, CHOPPER HAD A BIG HEART. SLOWLY HE AMBLED ACROSS THE ROAD.

HEY, POP— WHAT'S UP WITH THAT KID?

TWO MONTHS AGO, THE GERMANS THEY KILL HIS MAMA AND PAPA. NOW HIS HOME IS GONE! IT IS SAD, BUT IT IS WAR, SIGNORE.

CHOPPER RUDGE HAD BEEN RAISED IN AN ORPHANAGE. HE WAS NO STRANGER TO THE MISERY OF LONELINESS.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME, SON? LIKE SOME GRUB?

THANK YOU, SIGNORE. MY NAME IS NICIOLA, NICIOLA BELLINI.

THE BOY ATE HIS WAY RAVENOUSLY THROUGH CHOPPER'S ENTIRE RATION, BUT THE BIG PARATROOPER DID NOT BEGRUDGE HIM A MORSEL OF IT.

WHILE RUDGE WHITTLED A CRUDE TOY BOAT FROM A PIECE OF WOOD, NICIOLA TALKED OF THE HAPPY DAYS HE BARELY REMEMBERED...

YOU SPEAK PRETTY GOOD ENGLISH, NICKY.

BEFORE THE WAR MY PAPA HE WORK FOR THE INGLESI. HE TEACH ME.

THEN THE INTERLUDE WAS OVER. SERGEANT STACEY'S VOICE PRODDED THE MEN TO THEIR FEET.
GUESS THIS IS WHERE WE MOVE ON. SO LONG, KID. LOOK AFTER YOURSELF.
SI, SIGNORE.

WITH GOOD-HUMOURED GROUSING, THE PARATROOPERS RESUMED THE LINE OF MARCH.
HERE WE GO AGAIN! ANOTHER BASH UP THE ROAD -- THEN WE'LL SMASH UP SOME POOR LITTLE EYTIE TOWN THAT DON'T DESERVE IT. JUST TO NAIL A FEW JERRIES!

AS USUAL, THE INSEPARABLE COMPANIONS, CORPORAL DUKE, CHOPPER AND BARNEY TRUDGED AT THE REAR OF THE COLUMN. AS THEY SWUNG CLEAR OF THE TOWN...

WHAT THE HECK...? WHAT YOU WANT, NICKY?

I JOIN YOU, SIGNORE CHOPPER. I JOIN PARACADUTISTA BRITANNI!

GRUFFLY, RUDGE WENT TO ORDER THE BOY HOME. THEN HE REMEMBERED THERE WAS NO HOME, JUST A PILE OF RUBBLE.

OKAY, NICKY. YOU CAN MARCH WITH US, BUT JUST TO THE TOP OF THE NEXT HILL! THEN YOU'VE GOT TO GO...

SI, SIGNORE. ME INGLESI SOLDIER NOW.

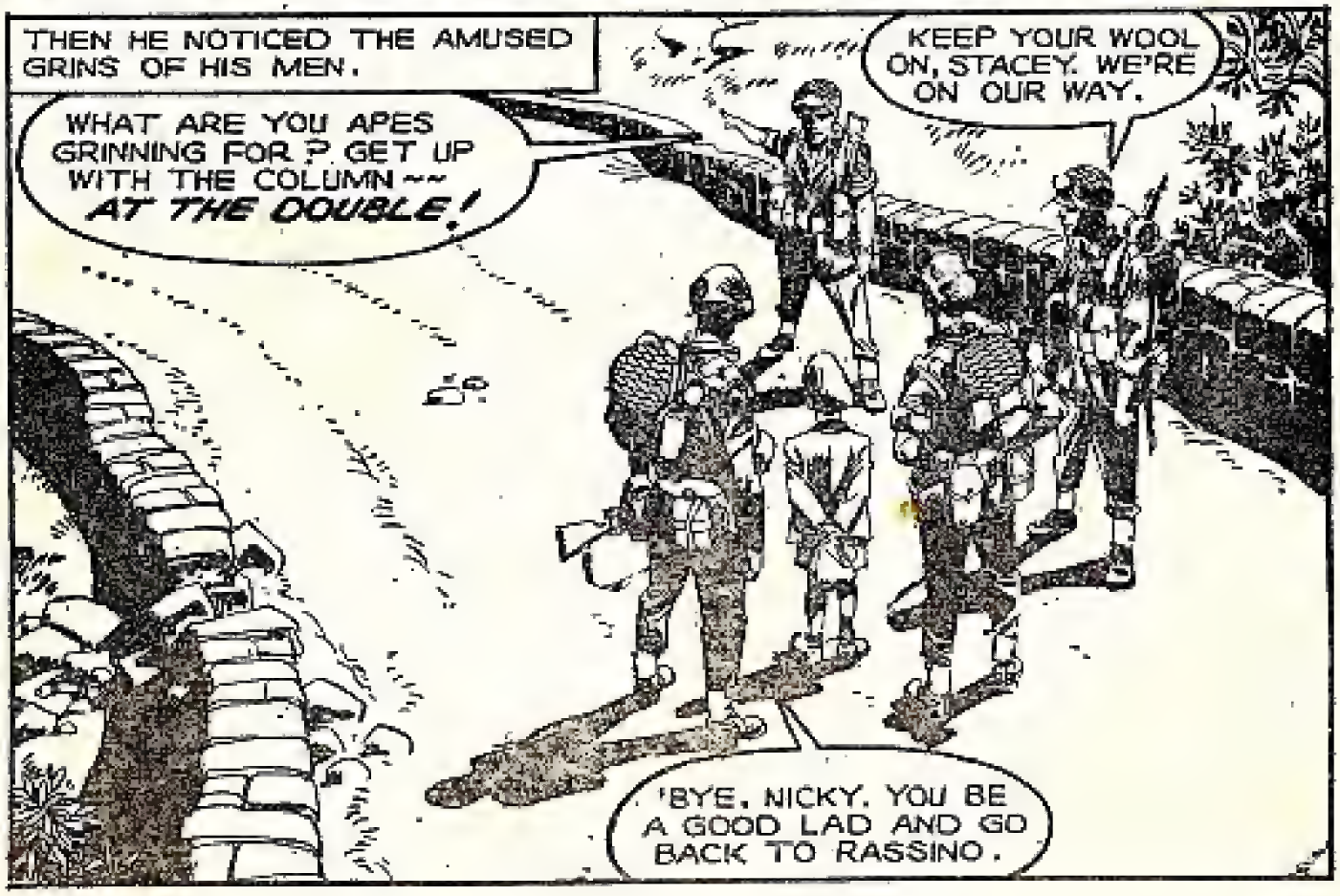
WITH CORPORAL DUKE'S BERET ON HIS HEAD AND A DELIGHTED GRIN ON HIS FACE, NICOLA MARCHED WITH HOWARD'S HELL RAISERS.

WHAT D'YOU THINK THIS OUTFIT IS, RUDGE — AN ORPHANAGE? GET THAT KID OUT OF...

LAY OFF, SARGE! CHOPPER WAS ONLY TRYING TO CHEER THE NIPPER UP.

COME ON, NICKY. DOWN YOU GET, LAD. YOU'VE GOT TO HOP IT NOW.

THERE WERE MANY SOLDIERS OF THE WEHRMACHT WHO HAD STOPPED BREATHING SUDDENLY, TO PROVE THAT SERGEANT 'COLD STEEL' STACEY HAD BEEN WELL NAMED. BUT FOR A MOMENT, HIS HARD FACE CRACKED INTO A SMILE...
HERE, KID ~~ TAKE THIS AND SCARPER!


THEN HE NOTICED THE AMUSED GRINS OF HIS MEN.
WHAT ARE YOU APES GRINNING FOR? GET UP WITH THE COLUMN ~~ AT THE DOUBLE!
KEEP YOUR WOOL ON, STACEY. WE'RE ON OUR WAY.
'BYE, NICKY. YOU BE A GOOD LAD AND GO BACK TO RASSINO.

THEY REJOINED THE COLUMN. THEN, AS THEY BREASTED THE HILL, BARNEY GLANCED BACK...
I HATE TO TELL YER THIS, CHOPPER, BUT YER LITTLE PAL IS STILL ON OUR TAIL.
OH, NO!

RUDGE WALKED SLOWLY BACK. DELIBERATELY, HE SET HIS FACE IN A HARSH SCOWL.
SIGNORE CHOPPER, I MUST GET TO SAN ALTURO. YOU GO THERE?
IT AIN'T NO BUSINESS OF YOURS WHERE WE'RE GOING, 'SIDES, ALTURO'S FULL O' JERRIES. NOW, FOR THE LAST TIME~~ BUZZ!

NICIOLA'S TRAGIC FACE WRUNG CHOPPER'S HEART AS HE SHOVED THE YOUNGSTER AWAY.
PLEASE, SIGNORE, PLEASE ---- UGH!
HOP IT! COME PESTERING ME AGAIN AN I'LL LET YOU HAVE IT!

WHEN RUDGE REJOINED HIS COMRADES, THERE WAS A TIGHTNESS OF HIS JAW THAT THEY UNDERSTOOD AND DID NOT QUESTION. FLINT-EYED, THEY MARCHED ON. IT WAS JUST ANOTHER SCORE THEY HAD TO SETTLE WITH THE NAZIS.

SADLY, NICIOLA WATCHED THEM DISAPPEAR DOWN THE ONLY ROAD THAT LED THROUGH THE JAGGED MOUNTAIN RANGE GUARDING THE WAY TO SAN ALTURO.
WITH BIG, SOLEMN EYES, HE LOOKED BACK TOWARDS RASSINO. ALL HE HAD ONCE KNOWN AND LOVED LAY IN RUINS. AT SAN ALTURO HE WOULD FIND HIS UNCLE. IF THE BRITISH COULD NOT TAKE HIM ALONG THE ROAD, THEN HE WOULD CROSS THE MOUNTAIN RANGE BY THE REMOTE PATHS..

MUNGO HOWARD GLANCED AGAIN AT THE MAP CASE AND GAVE A GROWL OF DISAPPROVAL.
THERE'S NO OTHER ROUTE AND IT'S TOO STEEP TO SHOVE OUT FLANK GUARDS. WE'LL JUST HAVE TO BASH ON AND BE READY TO DUCK.
I'LL MOVE DUKE AND HIS LADS UP AS POINT SECTION. THEY CAN SENSE JERRIES A MILE OFF.
THE TRIO ADVANCED CAUTIOUSLY.
CHOPPER, NOW WE HAVE THE HONOUR OF BEING RIGHT IN THE FRONT OF THE WHOLE BLOOMIN' ARMY.
I'D RATHER BE TAIL-END CHARLIE WITH AN ENSA CONCERT PARTY.
DRY UP, YOU TWO! YOU'LL STILL BE YACKING WHEN YOU WALK STRAIGHT DOWN THE BARREL OF AN EIGHTY-EIGHT!
NICIOLA, MEANWHILE, WAS TOILING STEADILY UPWARDS~~ WHEN THE SOUND OF GUTTURAL VOICES CARRIED CLEARLY TO HIM.
ALL GUNS ARE SITED AND CAMOUFLAGE COMPLETED, HERR OBERST.
GOOD! YOU WILL AWAIT MY ORDER TO FIRE. I WANT ALL THOSE RED DEVILS IN THE NET.
AN AMBUSH!

NO SIGN YET, HERR LEUTNANT.
THE BRITISH DOGS TAKE THEIR TIME. NO MATTER! THEY ARE ON THEIR LAST MARCH.

FROM HIS HIGH PERCH, NICIOLA COULD SEE THE SINISTER SHADOWS CONCEALED IN THE MOUNTAIN CAVES AND THE WELL-SITED MACHINE GUN NESTS.
THE INGLESI! THEY WILL BE EATEN BY THOSE GUNS! I MUST WARN THEM!

UNSEEN, THE BOY CREPT AWAY FROM THE SPOT WHERE DEATH LAY WAITING.
IF I GO BACK BY THE PATH, IT WILL BE TOO LATE. IT MUST BE THIS WAY!
THE DESCENT OVER THAT TREACHEROUS ROCK FACE WOULD HAVE DISCOURAGED MANY AN EXPERIENCED MOUNTAINEER, BUT THE LITTLE ITALIAN NEVER HESITATED.

FOR FIVE HUNDRED FEET HE DEFIED DEATH ...

THEN HE CAME TO AN UGLY OVERHANG OF ROCK WHICH OFFERED NO POSSIBLE HOLD. COURAGEOUSLY, THE BOY MET THE CHALLENGE.

I AM PARACADUTISTA NOW. I JUMP!

HE LET GO AND LANDED WITH A SPINE-JARRING CRASH ON THE ROCKY GROUND.

TWICE HE TRIED TO RISE ONLY TO BE DRAGGED BACK BY A FIERY AGONY THAT STABBED UP THROUGH HIS LEG. THEN, SLOWLY, HE BEGAN TO CRAWL...

IT WAS ONLY THREE HUNDRED YARDS TO THE ROAD. BUT TO A LITTLE BOY WITH A FRACTURED LEG, IT WAS A LONG, LONG JOURNEY.

IT WAS BARNEY SMITH WHO FIRST SAW THE MOVEMENT, BUT WITH THEIR LIGHTNING REACTIONS, THE TRIO HIT THE DIRT SIMULTANEOUSLY.

OKAY, CHOPPER. WE'LL COVER YOU.

THANKS FOR NOTHING, PAL! LET HAWKEYE GO TAKE A SHUFTI.

YOU HEARD WHAT THE DUKE SAID. GET WEAVING! IF IT'S JERRIES, YOUR UGLY MUG'LL SCARE 'EM TO DEATH.

RUDGE HAD COVERED TWO HUNDRED YARDS WHEN HE STOPPED DEAD IN HIS TRACKS.
HELP, SIGNORE~~ HELP!

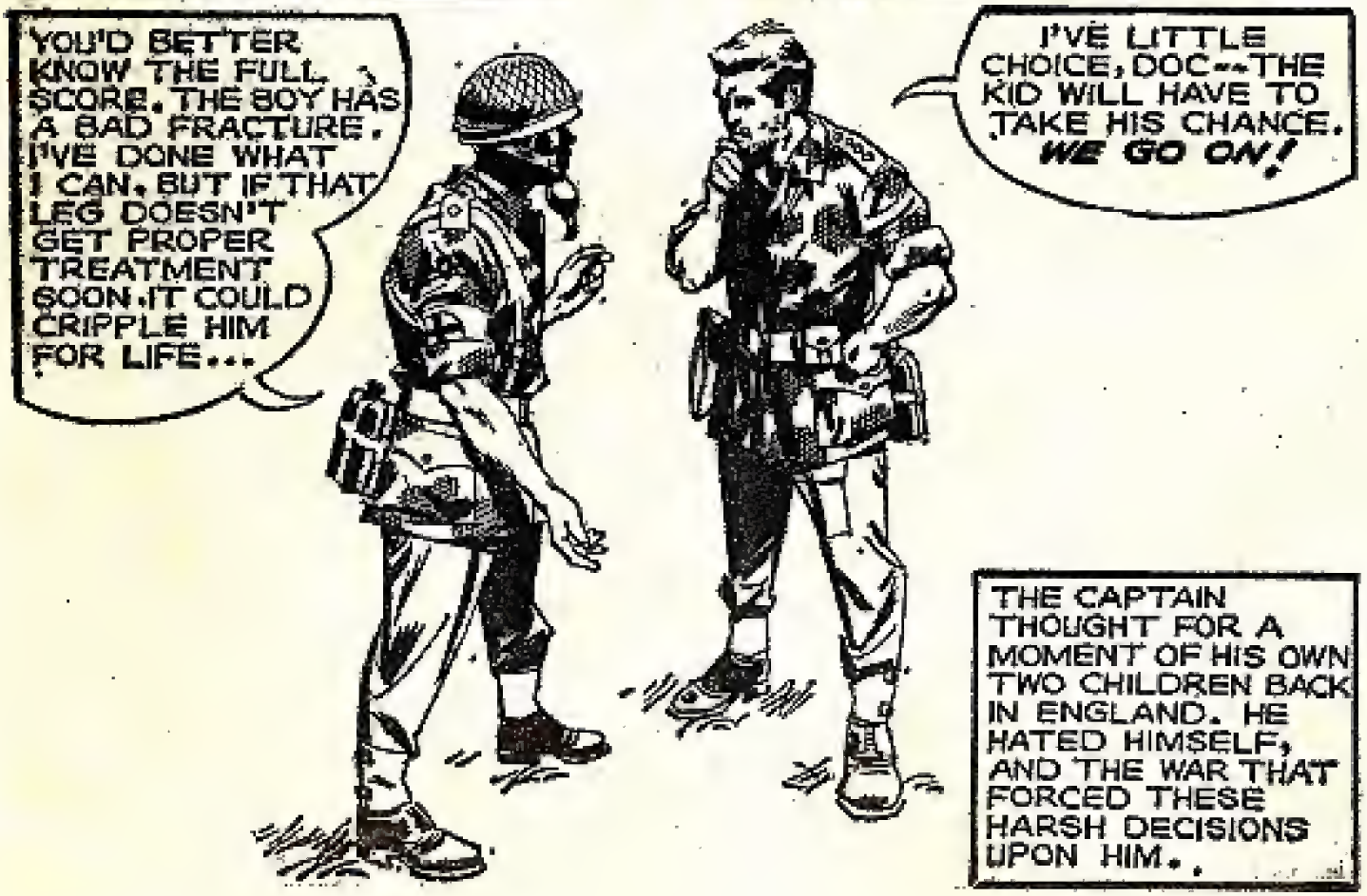
GENTLY, CHOPPER GATHERED THE CHILD UP. A SMALL TEAR-STAINED FACE SMILED AT HIM.
WHAT THE HECK HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO, NICKY?
THE GERMANS WAIT FOR YOU, CHOPPER~~ DON'T GO ON!
WHISTLE UP MUNGO AND THE DOC, BARNEY~~ AN' MAKE IT SNAPPY!

MUNGO LISTENED INTENTLY AS THE BOY TOLD HIS TALE...
HOW MANY GERMANS WERE THERE, SON?
I DO NOT KNOW, SIGNORE, BUT THEY HAVE MANY BIG GUNS.
YOU'RE A BRAVE KID. HANG ON, WE'LL SOON HAVE YOU FIXED UP NOW.

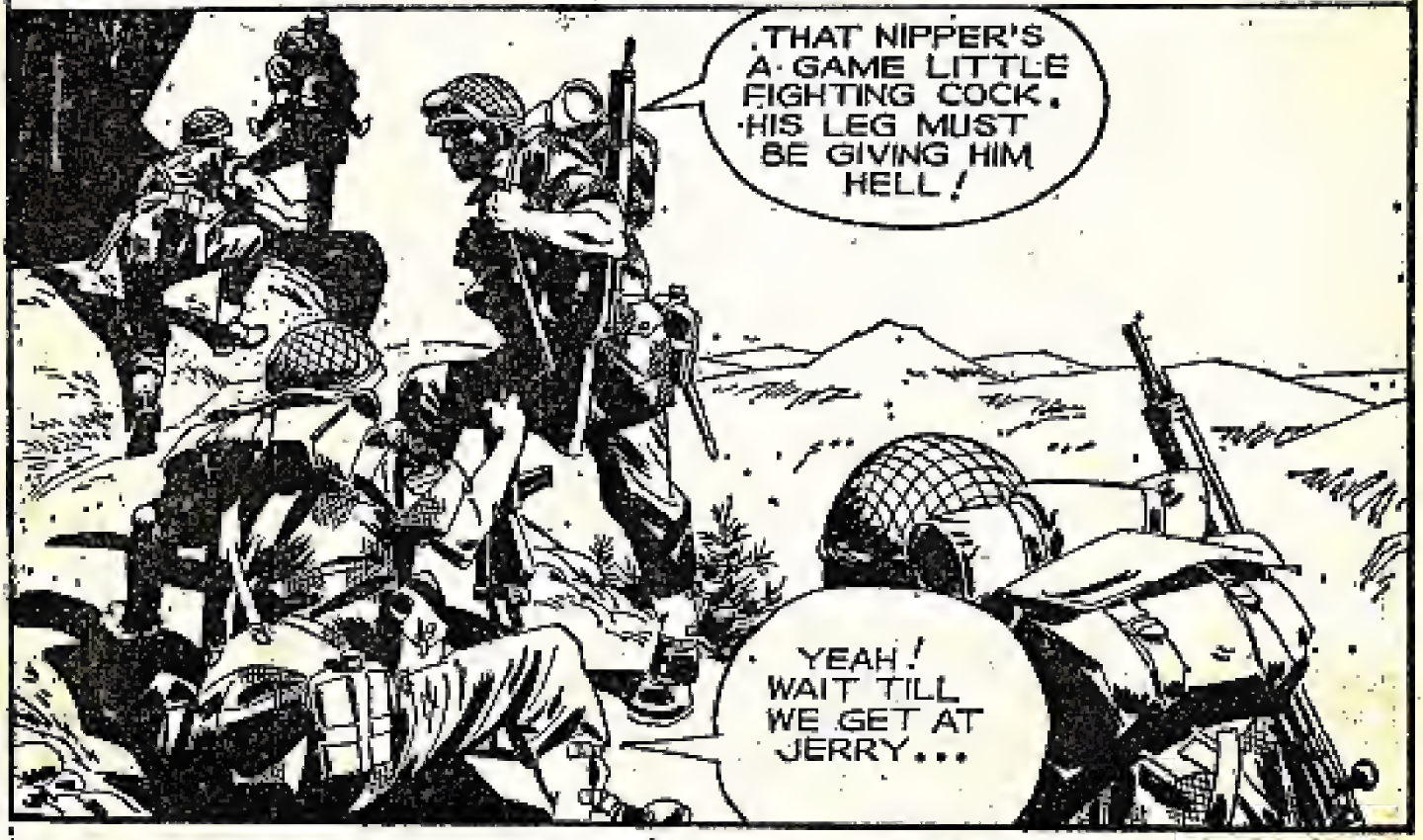
PRETTY CLOSE CALL. ANOTHER MILE AN' WE'D HAVE WALKED STRAIGHT INTO IT.
IF ONLY THERE WAS ANOTHER WAY ROUND THESE CURSED MOUNTAINS!

A LITTLE VOICE INTERRUPTED MUNGO'S GLOOMY THOUGHTS.
CAPITANO, THERE IS ANOTHER PATH! IT IS HARD AND DANGEROUS TO FOLLOW, BUT I COULD SHOW YOU THE WAY.
OH NO, YOU CAN'T, SON. YOU NEED HOSPITAL AND PRONTO.

YOU SAY THERE IS ANOTHER WAY ROUND?
SI, CAPITANO! I WAS ON THAT WAY TO SAN ALTURO WHEN I SEE THE GERMANS. I SHOW YOU!
MUNGO, JUST A MINUTE! I WANT A WORD WITH YOU.

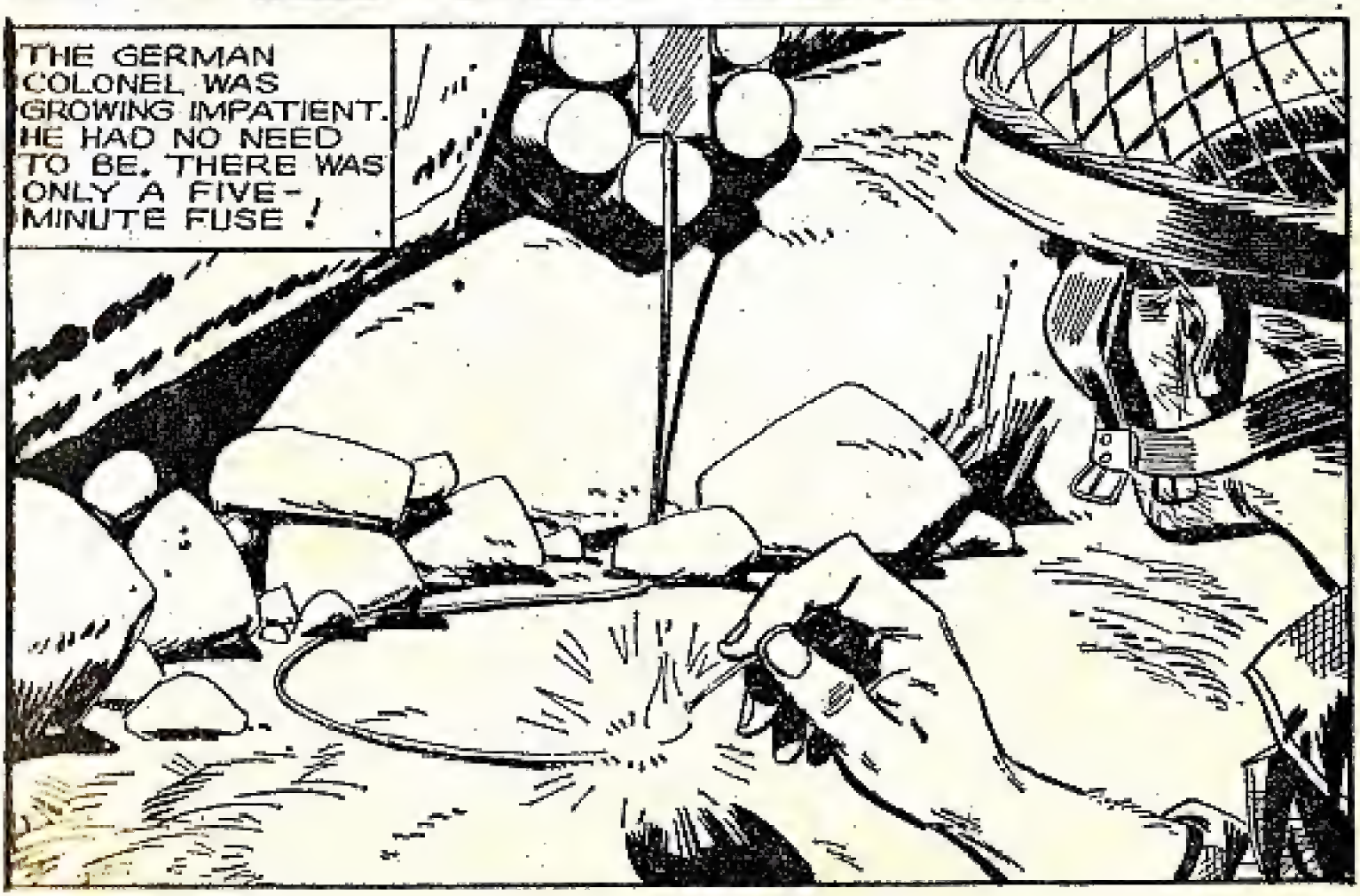

YOU'D BETTER KNOW THE FULL SCORE. THE BOY HAS A BAD FRACTURE. I'VE DONE WHAT I CAN, BUT IF THAT LEG DOESN'T GET PROPER TREATMENT SOON IT COULD CRIPPLE HIM FOR LIFE...
I'VE LITTLE CHOICE, DOC--THE KID WILL HAVE TO TAKE HIS CHANCE. WE GO ON!
THE CAPTAIN THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT OF HIS OWN TWO CHILDREN BACK IN ENGLAND. HE HATED HIMSELF, AND THE WAR THAT FORCED THESE HARSH DECISIONS UPON HIM..

HALF AN HOUR LATER, THEY WERE FORCE MARCHING ALONG A CRAZILY PRECIPITOUS PATH THAT LED STEADILY UPWARDS THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS.



THERE WAS A GRIM SMILE OF SATISFACTION ON CAPTAIN HOWARD'S FACE WHEN THE SERGEANT JOINED HIM.

M'INGO WOULD RATHER MEET HIS FOE FACE TO FACE, BUT HIS JOB WAS TO DESTROY THE ENEMY AND KEEP HIS MEN ALIVE.
PITY WE AIN'T GOT ANY T.N.T.
YOU'RE A BLOOD-THIRSTY CUSS, STACEY. THIS GUN COTTON SHOULD DO WELL ENOUGH.


THE GERMAN COLONEL WAS GROWING IMPATIENT. HE HAD NO NEED TO BE. THERE WAS ONLY A FIVE-MINUTE FUSE!

ACH! WHY DON'T THESE ENGLANDERS COME? UNTERLEUTNANT SCHMIDT, SEND OUT A ....
HIMMEL! THE MOUNTAIN!
THE COLONEL NEVER FINISHED HIS SENTENCE! THE SILENCE WAS SUDDENLY RENT BY A SHARP EXPLOSION, FOLLOWED BY AN OMINOUS RUMBLING...

...THE MOUNTAINSIDE SEEMED TO TREMBLE AND A WALL OF DEATH SWEPT DOWNWARDS, OBLITERATING EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH.
RUN!
AAAGH!

THE HELL RAISERS STOPPED AND LOOKED BACK. SOMEHOW, THEY FOUND NO PLEASURE IN THEIR TRIUMPH. IT WAS JUST ONE MORE BITTER MILE-STONE.
WE'VE SETTLED PART OF THE DEBT FOR YOU, NICKY.
HE'S ASLEEP, MUNGO -- BETTER THAT WAY. HE'S SEEN ENOUGH VIOLENCE.

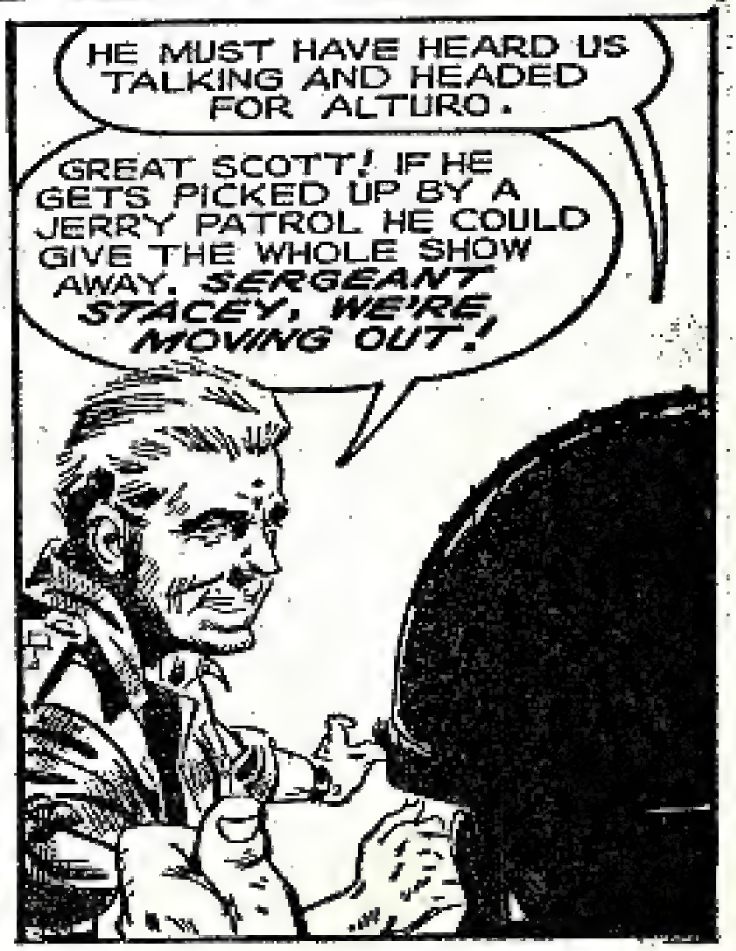
BY NIGHTFALL, SAN ALTURO WAS ONLY THREE MILES AWAY.
HOW'S THE KID GOING TO MAKE OUT, DOC?
DEPENDS! IF WE CAN GET HIM TO HOSPITAL IN THE NEXT TOWN, HE'LL BE OKAY, OTHERWISE...

MEANWHILE, A RECONNAISSANCE PATROL PROBED WARILY AROUND THE SLEEPING TOWN.
HEY, DUKE, LOOK AT THOSE PANZERS! THEY'VE GOT THIS TOWN RINGED WITH STEEL!
MUNGO AIN'T GOING TO LIKE THIS. COME ON, WE'VE FOUND WHAT WE CAME FOR.

HALF AN HOUR LATER, THEY REPORTED TO THE CAPTAIN.
AS BAD AS THAT, IS IT?
'FRAID SO, MUNGO. STIFF WITH JERRY ARMOUR.
JUST SAY THE WORD AND WE'LL GO IN AN' TAKE THAT PLACE APART. THE LADS ARE ITCHING FOR A SCRAP.
FOR LONG SECONDS, MUNGO SAT WITH BOWED SHOULDERS. THEN...
NOT ONE OF US WOULD LIVE TO GET WITHIN A HUNDRED YARDS OF THE TOWN. YOU KNOW THE DRILL -- WE WHISTLE UP FOR AN AIR STRIKE. WHEN THEY'VE KNOCKED HECK OUT O' THE PLACE WE GO IN.
NO, SIGNORE... NO!

IS THERE NO OTHER WAY, CAPTAIN? FOR THE KID'S SAKE...
YOU KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT AS WELL AS I DO, RUDGE! I DON'T ENJOY THIS GAME!
NOBODY NOTICED THE SMALL FIGURE THAT CRAWLED AWAY INTO THE NIGHT.

MOROSELY THE CAPTAIN MOVED ACROSS TO THE REAR LINK RADIO.
WE'VE MADE CONTACT ON R.T., SIR. SIGNAL, STRENGTH FOUR...
MUNGO! THE KID NICKY — HE'S GONE!


HE MUST HAVE HEARD US TALKING AND HEADED FOR ALTURO.
GREAT SCOTT! IF HE GETS PICKED UP BY A JERRY PATROL HE COULD GIVE THE WHOLE SHOW AWAY. SERGEANT STACEY, WE'RE MOVING OUT!

Chapter 3. Moment of Victory

RUDGE MELTED SWIFTLY INTO THE DARKNESS. UNEASILY, THE MEN SETTLED TO WAIT...
WE'VE BEEN PUSHING OUR LUCK A LONG WHILE, SERGEANT. AFTER THIS SHOW WE'LL PULL OUT FOR A REST.
I KNOW THE LADS ARE EDGY, SIR, BUT WHAT WE WANT'S A REAL GOOD DUST-UP WITH THE JERRY.
THE LUMINOUS HANDS OF THE CAPTAIN'S WATCH GLOWED AT ONE MINUTE TO ELEVEN WHEN THERE CAME A HOARSE CHALLENGE.
HOLD IT, CAPTAIN! CHOPPER'S SHOWN UP.
HALT OR I FIRE!
TRIUMPHANTLY, RUDGE LED NICKY AND A SWARTHY ITALIAN INTO THE CAMP.
OKAY, RUDGE, WHO'S YOUR PAL THIS TIME?
HE'S THE LEADER OF THE LOCAL RESISTANCE OUTFIT. NICKY SLIPPED OUT TO GET HIM. HIS NAME'S MARIO, AND HE'S GOT THE FULL GRIFF ON THE JERRY PLANS.
RIGHT, SPILL IT OUT! BUT IT HAD BETTER BE GOOD!

WITHOUT FURTHER INVITATION, MARIO PRODUCED A TATTERED MAP...
SI, SIGNORE! THE TOWN IS ONLY HELD BY PANZERS. TONIGHT, A TRAIN BRINGS INFANTRY REINFORCEMENTS. BUT THEY WILL NEVER REACH ALTURO. MY MEN ARE ALREADY IN POSITION HERE! AT THE JUNCTION NORTH OF THE TOWN.
BY THUNDER! A FORCED MARCH AND WE COULD...

BECAUSE HE HAD NEVER GAMBLED, MUNGO HOWARD HAD GUIDED HIS COMPANY WITH BRILLIANT SUCCESS THROUGH A LONG AND BITTER CAMPAIGN.
...BUT IT COULD MEAN ANNIHILATION...
MESSAGE FROM BRIGADE, SIR!

"FROM HARPOON TO DAGGER FORCE--- DO NOT ATTACK SAN ALTURO. INTELLIGENCE REPORT HELD IN STRENGTH. REPEAT; MAINTAIN YOUR POSITION. DO NOT ATTACK...BRIGADE COMMANDER."
BUT FOR ONCE, CAPTAIN MUNGO HOWARD WAS PREPARED TO ROLL THE DICE.
WE NEVER RECEIVED THAT MESSAGE. WE ATTACK! JERRY WILL GET HIS REINFORCEMENTS. BUT THEY WON'T BE THE ONES HE'S EXPECTING.
BY MIDNIGHT, "D" COMPANY HAD SKIRTED THE TOWN AND JOINED FORCES WITH THE ITALIAN PARTISANS.
ALL THE CHARGES ARE LAID. WHEN THE GERMANS COME---POOF! IF ANY SURVIVE, WE HAVE OUR MACHINE GUNS WELL SITED.
MARIO, I WANT YOUR MEN TO REMOVE THOSE CHARGES. THE TRAIN MUST GO THROUGH.
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND, SIGNORE!

AS THE CAPTAIN EXPLAINED HIS PLAN, BROAD SMILES BROKE OUT ON THE ITALIANS' FACES.
THERE'S A JUNCTION IN THE TRACK A MILE FROM ALTURO. ONE OF THE LINES LEADS TO AN OLD QUARRY... NOW IF THOSE POINTS WERE SWITCHED -- IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO PULL UP A TRAIN AT FULL SPEED.
SAPRISTI! IT IS GOOD, CAPITANO. BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE USED OUR GUNS.

YOU'LL GET YOUR CHANCE! CAN YOUR BOYS RUSTLE UP ANOTHER TRAIN?
SI, SIGNORE! MOST OF THESE MEN WORKED IN THE MARSHALLING YARD. BUT WHY?
NEVER MIND THAT! YOU GET A TRAIN ON THIS TRACK JUST AFTER THE GERMAN ONE AND I PROMISE YOU'LL SEE ALL THE FIREWORKS YOU WANT.

WITH THE DETAILS OF THE PLAN COMPLETE, THE PARTIES SPLIT UP. CORPORAL DUKE AND BARNEY ACCOMPANIED THE PARTISANS TO THE MARSHALLING YARDS. THERE, MARIO MARCHED BOLDLY UP TO THE GERMAN GUARD ...
Km 1.371
DON'T YOU KNOW THERE IS A CURFEW? WHERE IS YOUR PERMIT, SCUM?

WHERE DO THE REST O' THE KRAUTS HANG OUT?
CURFEW? WE GOT A SLEEPING OUT PASS, CHUM! COP THIS!
UUUGH!
THE GUARDROOM IS OVER THERE.
18

BARNEY USED A SEVEN-SECOND GRENADE. HE PULLED THE PIN, THEN COUNTED FOUR ...
ACH!
HEY, BARNEY, HAVE YOU TAKEN ROOT? COME ON, PAL. WE AIN'T STARTED YET.
IF THE JERRIES WERE PLAYING POKER, I RECKON I WAS HOLDING WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL A ROYAL FLUSH.

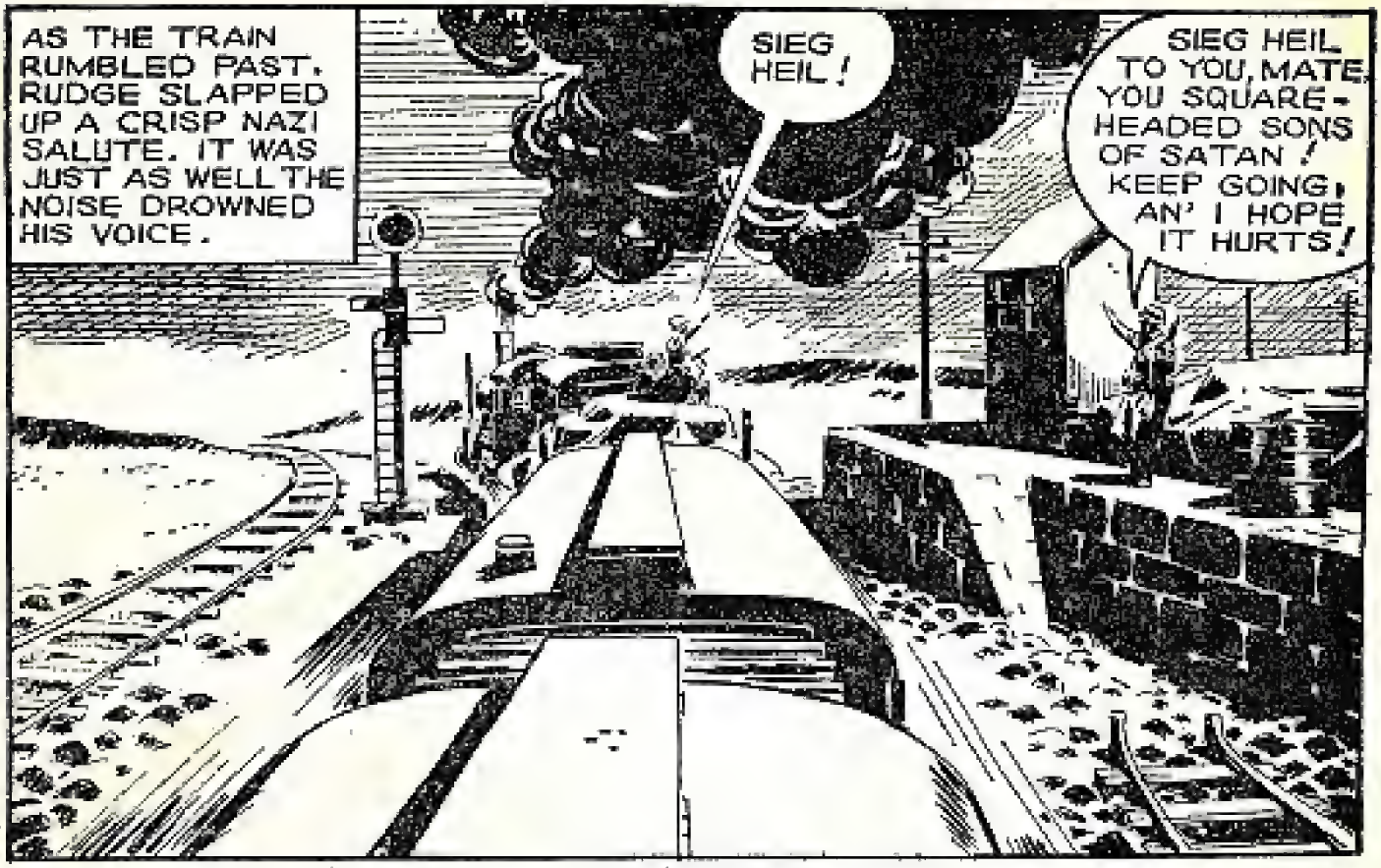
MEANWHILE, DARK SHADOWS CLOSED AROUND THE RAIL JUNCTION A MILE FROM ALTURO.
WE'RE TOO CLOSE TO THE TOWN FOR SHOOTING, AND YOU CAN BET YOUR BOOTS THERE'S A COUPLE OF JERRIES IN THAT SIGNAL BOX. NICKY, COULD YOU KEEP THAT SENTRY TALKING FOR A FEW MOMENTS ?
SI, SIGNORE!
YOU NOBBLE THE SENTRY, RUDGE. I'LL WORK THOSE MERCHANTS OVER IN THE SIGNAL BOX.
AS THE LITTLE FIGURE LIMPED OUT OF THE DARKNESS, THE NAZI SENTRY RELAXED WITH A CRUEL GRIN.
ACHTUNG! ACH! AN ITALIAN BRAT!
QUICK, SIGNORE! INGLESI!

PARACADUTISTA INGLESES!
WHERE ARE THEY, YOU LITTLE DOG?
BREATHING RIGHT DOWN YOUR NECK, MATE!

THE GERMANS IN THE SIGNAL BOX HEARD THE DOOR OPEN AND TURNED TO FACE SERGEANT STACEY...
HIMMEL!
ACH!
THE SERGEANT COULD MOVE WITH THE SPEED OF A COBRA. THE TWO NAZIS WOULD GIVE NO ALARM.

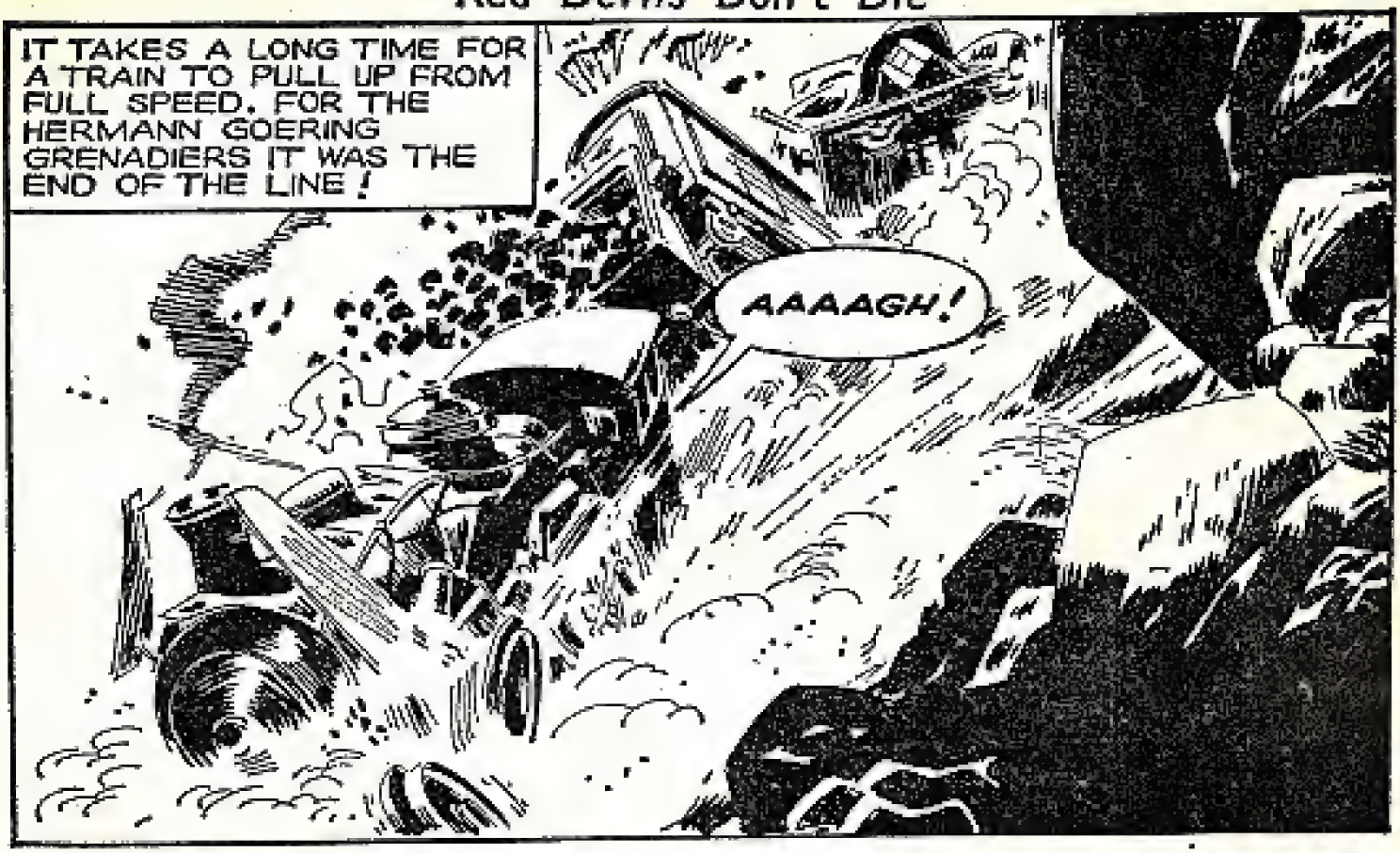
WITHIN A FEW MOMENTS IT WAS ALL OVER.
NICE GOING, SERGEANT.
HOW DO I LOOK AS A KRAUT, CAPTAIN?

THE MOURNFUL WAIL OF A TRAIN WHISTLE GALVANISED THEM INTO ACTION.
SNAP INTO IT, LADS! I CAN HEAR THE TRAIN COMING.
JUST WAVE 'EM THROUGH, RUDGE. WE'LL BE COVERING YOU. OKAY, YOU LOT, GET TO COVER.
THAT IS FUNNY! I THOUGHT WE KEPT TO THE LEFT TRACK AT THE POINTS?
ALL IS WELL, YOU DUMMKOPF! OUR GUARDS ARE STILL THERE. YOU KNOW OUR ORDERS. WE MUST REACH ALTURO QUICKLY.


AS THE TRAIN RUMBLED PAST, RUDGE SLAPPED UP A CRISP NAZI SALUTE. IT WAS JUST AS WELL THE NOISE DROWNED HIS VOICE.
SIEG HEIL!
SIEG HEIL TO YOU, MATE. YOU SQUARE-HEADED SONS OF SATAN! KEEP GOING, AN' I HOPE IT HURTS!

THE TRAIN HURTLED THROUGH THE NIGHT AND WAS ONLY A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE QUARRY WHEN THE SWEATING DRIVER SAW THE YAWNING CHASM...

HIMMEL! WE HAVE BEEN TRICKED!
KARL... THE BRAKES... SCHNELL!


IT TAKES A LONG TIME FOR A TRAIN TO PULL UP FROM FULL SPEED. FOR THE HERMANN GOERING GRENADIERS IT WAS THE END OF THE LINE!
AAAAGH!

MUNGO DID NOT SHARE THE JUBILATION OF THE PARTISANS. HIS COLD GREY EYES LOOKED DOWN THE TRACK TOWARD ALTURO.
BRAVO, CAPITANO! A WHOLE GERMAN REGIMENT DESTROYED!
IT WAS A JOB AND WE DID IT ~~ THAT'S ALL!
SIGNORE CAPITANO, THERE ARE STILL MANY GERMANS IN ALTURO. GLADLY WE WILL FIGHT, BUT WE ARE SO FEW...

IT WOULD TAKE A BRIGADE TO BLAST THROUGH THE JERRY DEFENCES. BUT YOU'VE HEARD OF THE WOODEN HORSE OF TROY? THIS TRAIN'S GOING TO TAKE US RIGHT INTO THE HEART OF THE TOWN WITHOUT FIRING A SHOT. THEN WE'LL HIT 'EM HARD!
THESE WERE THE FIGHTING WORDS "D" COMPANY HAD WAITED LONG TO HEAR. EAGERLY THEY SWARMED ABOARD THE TRAIN.

MARIO, YOUR MEN WILL ACT AS GUIDES TO THE STRONGPOINTS. ONCE WE'VE GOT THE H.Q., I'LL FIRE TWO RED VEREY LIGHTS. CLOSE IN, AND WE'LL MOP UP AFTERWARDS.
I WOULD LIKE TO COME WITH YOU TO THE NAZI HEADQUARTERS, CAPITANO. THE COMMANDANT--A PERSONAL MATTER, YOU UNDERSTAND?

IN THE OTHER CARRIAGES, GRENADES WERE PRIMED, EVERY SPARE MAGAZINE LOADED WITH AMMUNITION.
YOU GIVE ME GUN, CHOPPER, I HELP SHOOT GERMANS.
YOU'VE DONE MORE THAN YOUR SHARE' LAD, JUST KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN.
CHOPPER'S RIGHT, KID. STAY PUT 'TIL YOU SEE TWO RED LIGHTS.

THE TRAIN PANTED TO A HALT IN THE ILL-LIT STATION. A GERMAN MAJOR STEPPED FORWARD — AND FOUND HIMSELF LOOKING STRAIGHT INTO THE MUZZLE OF A PISTOL.
THE COMMANDER'S COMPLIMENTS, HERR...
AND THE SAME TO YOU, FRITZ.
THE GERMAN GUARDS WERE STILL STANDING STIFFLY TO ATTENTION WHEN THEY WERE SWEPT DOWN BY A SEETHING MASS OF KHAKI-CLAD FIGURES.

IT WAS ALL OVER IN A FEW MOMENTS. SWIFTLY THREE PARTIES OF MEN LED BY PARTISANS FANNED OUT TOWARD, THEIR OBJECTIVES.
LEAD ON, MARIO. WE'LL PAY OUR RESPECTS TO THE COMMANDANT.
SI. GENERAL VON KLINGER ORDERED THE EXECUTION OF MY FAMILY. NOW I REPAY HIM!
GENERAL VON KLINGER WAS PLEASED TO HEAR THE STEADY TRAMP OF MARCHING FEET IN THE STREET BELOW.
EXCELLENT! THE GRENADIERS COME. NOW IF THE ENGLANDER DOGS...
HIMMEL! BUT THAT WAS SHOTS! WHAT...
SUDDENLY, THE DOORS SPLINTERED OPEN--AND GENERAL VON KLINGER READ HIS DEATH WARRANT IN THE MERCILESS EYES OF MARIO.
YOU HAVE BUTCHERED MANY, GENERAL. NOW IT IS YOUR TURN!

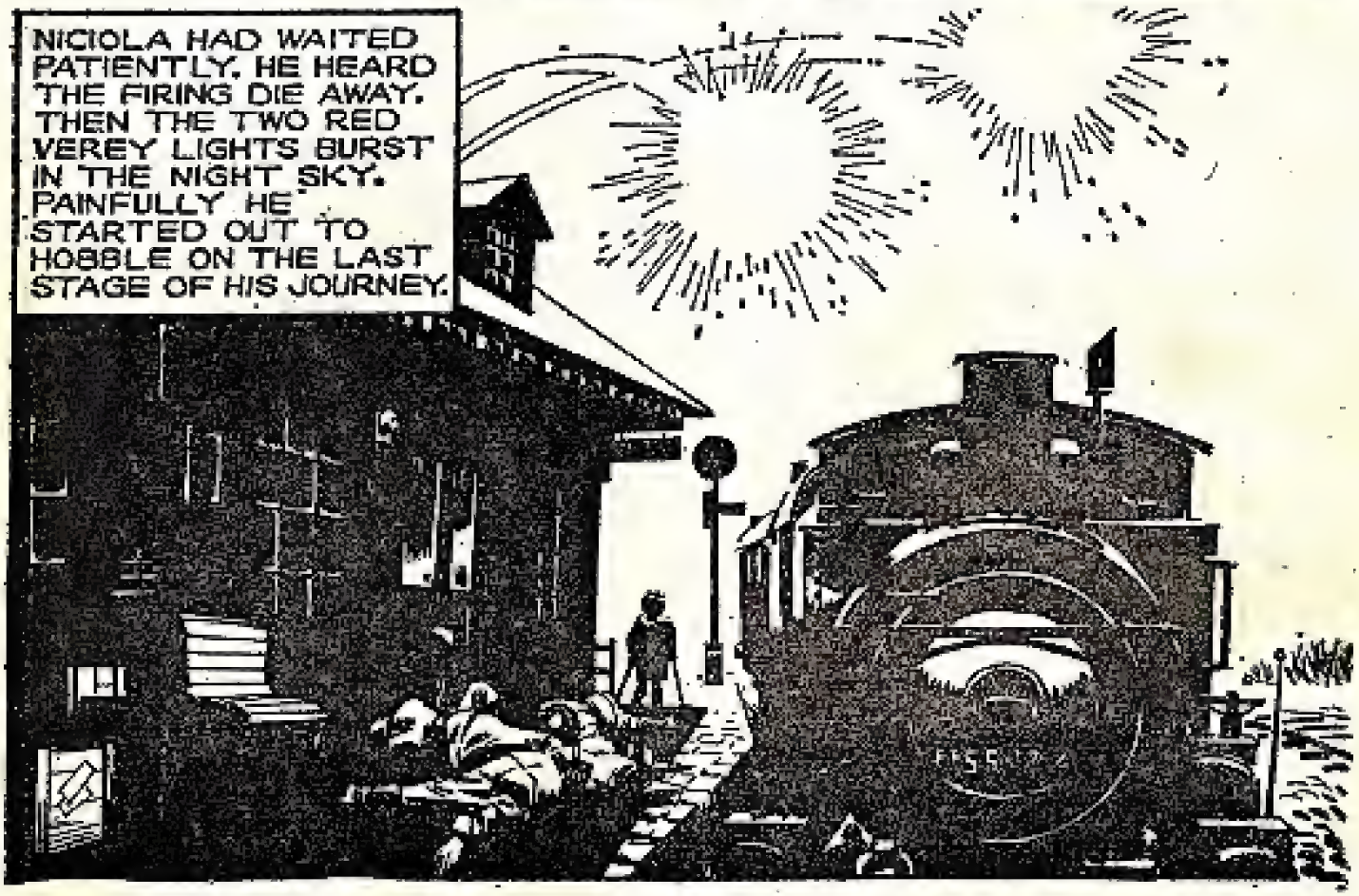
AS THE CORDITE FUMES CLEARED, MARIO FITTED A FRESH CLIP TO HIS GUN . . .
IT WAS QUICK AND CLEAN. MY FAMILY ARE AVENGED!
LET'S GO, MARIO! WE'VE JUST TOUCHED OFF THE FUSE AND THE FIREWORKS WILL GO OFF ANY TIME NOW.

THE GERMAN GARRISON WERE STUMBLING FROM THEIR BILLETS INTO A WITHERING FIRE THAT SEEMED TO COME FROM ALL DIRECTIONS.
ACHTUNG! ATTACK...ATTACK... AAAAGH!

THE NAZI TANKS AND GUNS HAD BEEN WELL POSITIONED TO REPEL AN ATTACK AGAINST THE TOWN. BUT THEY WERE NOT PREPARED FOR THE LEGION OF ELUSIVE SHADOWS THAT WROUGHT HAVOC IN THEIR MIDST.

THE PENT-UP FURY OF THE PARATROOPS AND THEIR PARTISAN ALLIES FELL UPON THE DISORGANISED STORM TROOPS.

WITHIN HALF AN HOUR, ONLY A FEW ISOLATED POCKETS OF FANATICAL NAZIS HELD OUT. THE REMAINDER SURRENDERED OR LAY STILL IN THE STREETS.
THE LADS HAVE SURE HAD THEIR FIELD DAY, CAPTAIN.
YES, IT WORKED! I'LL FIRE THE SIGNAL AND CALL THE WOLVES OFF, THERE'S BEEN ENOUGH BLOOD-LETTING.


NICIOLA HAD WAITED PATIENTLY. HE HEARD THE FIRING DIE AWAY. THEN THE TWO RED VEREY LIGHTS BURST IN THE NIGHT SKY. PAINFULLY HE STARTED OUT TO HOBBLE ON THE LAST STAGE OF HIS JOURNEY.

THE BOY DID NOT SEE THE GRIM FIGURE DRAGGING ITSELF ALONG THE DARKENED STREET. IT WAS A BADLY WOUNDED NAZI OFFICER, A SCHMEISSER GRIPPED IN HIS HAND, DETERMINED TO STRIKE ONE LAST BLOW FOR THE FATHERLAND.
HEIN! I'LL TAKE ONE MORE DOG WITH ME!

AS THE GERMAN'S FINGER TIGHTENED ON THE TRIGGER, CHOPPER RUDGE TURNED THE CORNER AND GAVE A GREAT WARNING CRY...
LOOK OUT, NICKY! GET DOWN!
SCHWEINHUND... UUUUGH!

THE NAZI FULFILLED HIS SELF-APPOINTED TASK, FOR THE WILD BURST CAUGHT RUDGE FULL IN THE CHEST.
CHOPPER -- SIGNORE CHOPPER!

AS THE PARATROOPS REFORMED, THE ITALIAN POPULATION EMERGED FROM THEIR HOUSES AND CELLARS. THE MAYOR OF THE TOWN CAME TO GREET THE GAUNT-FACED CAPTAIN.
YOU SAVED OUR TOWN AND MARIO TELLS ME YOU BRING MY LITTLE NEPHEW FROM RASSINO. WE CANNOT REPAY THIS DEBT, SIGNORE.
THE BOY IS DOWN AT THE STATION. CORPORAL DUKE, GO FETCH HIM!
OKAY, MUNGO! COME ON, BARNEY!

THEY FOUND NICKY WITH THEIR COMRADE WHERE HE HAD FALLEN.
CHOPPER -- HE SAVE MY LIFE!
DON'T CRY, SON. RED DEVIL'S DON'T DIE—OLD CHOPPER'LL BE MARCHING WITH US 'TIL IT'S ALL OVER. COME ON, YOUR UNCLE'S WAITING FOR YOU.
AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS, THE BRIGADIER SHOOK HIS GRIZZLY HEAD IN BEWILDERMENT.
I ORDER HIM NOT TO ATTACK, AND HE CAPTURES THE CONFOUNDED TOWN AND DESTROYS A WHOLE REGIMENT OF JERRY INFANTRY FOR GOOD MEASURE.
THAT'S MUNGO -- AND HIS HELL RAISERS, SIR!

-SEND A SIGNAL TO CAPTAIN HOWARD. TELL HIM "D" COMPANY IS TO WITHDRAW TO REST AREA -- AND ADD MY CONGRATULATIONS ON HIS IMMEDIATE AWARD OF THE D.S.O.

IN SAN ALTURO, THE PRISONERS HAD BEEN HANDED OVER TO THE PARTISANS. THE WOUNDED WERE BEING MOVED BACK, AND THE HELL RAISERS PREPARED TO MARCH OUT.
WE LOST TEN MEN LAST NIGHT, DOC. I'VE GOT MYSELF TO BLAME FOR THAT.
YOU SAVED A LOT OF INNOCENT PEOPLE, MUNGO. SOMEHOW, I DON'T RECKON THE LADS WE LOST WOULD HOLD IT AGAINST YOU.

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